
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1743-55 N Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Dupont Circle Historic District		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	November 29, 2012	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	12-612	X	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Architect Jeff Goin (PGN Architects), representing Innovative Development Group (IDG, represented by Steven Coniglio), seeks conceptual design review for a project in the Dupont Circle Historic District involving renovation and alterations to five townhouses, and construction of a six-story addition at the rear of the lots. The project would convert the properties to a multi-unit apartment building.

Property Description

The 1700 block of N Street is one of the most varied and architecturally significant in Dupont Circle, reflecting some of the finest late 19th and early 20th century architect-designed residences in the district. The block has served as home to many socially and culturally prominent residents for which Dupont Circle was once notable, including Presidents Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. For the past fifty or so years, the block has been a quiet oasis in the midst of downtown, its' historic buildings sensitively rehabilitated and reused for associations, philanthropic institutions, professional offices, hotels and restaurants.

The subject site includes five contributing buildings. The three five-story townhouses at 1751-55 were built as a symmetrical block in 1889. Unified by their composition and dark palette of Seneca stone and brick, they exhibit a blend of the Queen Anne and Romanesque styles; their architect is unrecorded. The four-story structure east of and recessed from the façade of 1751 was constructed as an addition to that house in 1908; it is now referred to as 1749. The four-story Georgian Revival styled residence at 1745 was built in 1902, designed by architect Waddy Wood. The four-story building at 1743 was constructed in 1896, also designed by Wood in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. Its first two floors have been extensively altered; the original façade had a rusticated sandstone base, raised entrance, two-story projecting bay, and was capped by a red tile roof. All of the buildings are currently vacant.

Previous Reviews

Proposals for this site were reviewed by the HPRB in 2005-2006 and again in 2010 with plans developed by different architects working for a different owner. The HPRB's primary focus in past reviews was on the treatment of the historic buildings and ensuring that the project would substantially retain and adapt the structures in a sensitive manner that did not result in substantial alteration or demolition. In May 2010, after reviewing several iterations and refinements, the Board approved a proposal wherein the primary building masses of all

five buildings would be retained, and the roofs of four of the five retained in full, with a low three-foot roof addition added to 1749 in order to allow for the fourth (attic) story to have sufficient head height to be occupiable.¹ Exterior and structural alterations included removal of the rear ell wing of 1743, the roof and a portion of the east first floor wall of 1749, and the fifth floor rear walls of 1751-55.² Modifications to interior structural walls and floor assemblies were limited to providing internal access through the properties, typically proposed as door openings rather than complete removal of walls. The Board determined that this scope of removal did not result in substantial demolition requiring review by the Mayor's Agent and was persuaded that the extent of interior retention – including the proposed reuse of distinctive features and finishes such as mantles, stairs, and paneling – would provide a substantial preservation benefit that would give a far greater sense of the buildings' original character than would be provided by the retention of the rear wing at 1743.

While approving the conceptual treatment of the historic buildings, the Board asked for substantial restudy of the proposed five-story rear addition including pulling it away from the east property side line where it was felt to loom over the adjacent Tabard Inn and its rear yard garden courtyard. The Board also directed the architects to modulate the mass of the addition on the alley so it did not appear massive, tall, and monolithic, and to reconsider the architectural treatment which was found to emphasize rather than help mitigate and breakdown its size. The previous applicant did not return to the Board to address these outstanding issues.

Current Proposal

The applicants have developed the project picking up where the previous proposal left off. At the encouragement of the HPO, the applicants have adopted the same general retention and reuse treatment for the historic buildings that was approved by the Board after numerous reviews, and have focused their efforts on making revisions to the massing and design of the rear addition to address the Board's concerns about scale, architectural character and impacts on the adjacent Tabard Inn courtyard garden.

The entrance to the residential complex would be through the narrow side yard between 1745 and 1749, which would remain as an unenclosed passage. All of the ground level units in the historic buildings and the new rear addition would have their own entrances opening either to the street or a mid-block courtyard. Within the passage, new door openings would be created in the side elevations of 1745 and 1749 opening to transverse hallways and stairwells connecting the historic structures and providing access to upper level units. An elevator would be installed at the rear of 1749 with landings at each level above the passage; an open bridge would span across the courtyard at the second floor connecting to the addition at the rear of the property.

¹ The Board found the addition of a small slate mansard to be compatible in form and materials, and would not change the overall proportions or the subordinate relationship of the addition to 1751.

² Non-original, non-contributing elements (boiler chimneys, penthouses, and additions for utilities) were also proposed for removal.

The rear addition would be six stories, with a partial seventh floor with occupiable penthouses. The addition, including its 9'0" tall penthouse, would rise 76'8" in height as measured from the front curb (approximately 70' as measured from the higher alley elevation). It would be pulled 24' from the east property line, the width of the lot occupied by 1743. Below-grade parking would be provided under the addition and courtyard.

Evaluation

While the retention of rear ell wings has certainly been encouraged, the HPRB has often approved removal of utilitarian rear ell wings without referral to the Mayor's Agent, typically as part of a building's expansion to accommodate a larger, full-width addition. In most instances, the ell wings have been determined not to possess sufficient qualities to be defined as a "character-defining feature" of the building worthy of retention, and that removal would result in the property no longer having the "ability to convey its historic significance."

In this instance, arguably the most significant characteristic of 1743 is the high degree of design and architectural craftsmanship of the main block of the building, and how it contributes to a very significant streetscape -- qualities that would be unaffected by the removal of the ell. It is also not inappropriate to consider the extent of removal in the context of the project -- an adaptive reuse and rehabilitation project of five historic buildings where the removal of a rear wing is not unreasonable or unusual. As in the previous proposal, the HPO is also persuaded that the extent of interior retention -- including the proposed reuse of distinctive features and finishes such as mantles, stairs, and paneling -- will provide a substantial preservation benefit to this project and a far greater sense of the buildings' original character than would be provided by the retention of the rear wing at 1743. As the proposal continues to be developed, the specific retention and rehabilitation plan should be developed in consultation with the HPO.

The proposed rear addition is substantial in size but is not unprecedented for the southern portion of the Dupont Circle Historic District which urbanistically serves as a transition zone between the business district to the south and the lower-density residential neighborhood to the north.³ The area has a higher percentage of non-contributing buildings, taller buildings (both historic and non-contributing), greater density, and less uniformity of height than is found in the residential neighborhood to the north. This portion of the historic district also contains a number of projects approved by the HPRB over the years that are similar to the proposal in that they have included substantial additions or new construction behind retained small-scale historic buildings. While the specifics of each are somewhat different, the Board has acknowledged this urban context and approved large rear additions at 1752-54 N Street directly across the street from the subject properties (an eight-story building behind four-story rowhouses), the St. Matthew's project at 1717 Rhode Island Avenue, (an eight-story building behind four-story townhouses), 1818 N Street (a seven-story addition behind four-story rowhouse facades), 1828-34 Jefferson Place (a six story addition to the rear of three-story rowhouses), 1820-22 Jefferson Place (a five-story addition to the rear of three-story rowhouses), and 2000 Massachusetts Avenue (a five-story addition to the side of the landmark Blaine Mansion).

³ Not coincidentally, much of this area is zoned "Special Purpose," which is intended to serve as a buffer zone between commercial and residential areas.

The design of the rear addition has been developed as a contemporary and clearly differentiated structure with a much greater proportion of glass than is found on the historic structures, and is proposed to be clad in a cool, neutral palette of fiber cement and wood panels and aluminum windows with a steel bridge element. The building is organized in a non-traditional tripartite organization with a one-story base, three-story middle section, and a two-story top. The organization results in the top of the middle section essentially aligning with the height of the historic buildings.

While the design's composition and use of materials make an effort to break down the scale of the new construction, the resulting design does not have a particularly strong relationship to or compatibility with the historic buildings and the alley context. The rear elevations of buildings on this block are pretty consistently red or tan brick which when seen even on very different building types has a commonality of warm tones and small scale masonry units. By contrast, the very cool toned, large-scale cementitious panels feel very different in both size and in their range of color. Similarly, the composition of the façade elements might also warrant study in order to achieve a stronger relationship with its surroundings. The datum line created in the addition to relate to the tops of the historic buildings doesn't, by itself, result in a compatible relationship between the two elements. Alternative treatments for the top floors (to make them feel lighter and more recessive, rather than heavier) and grounding the addition with a strong base should be considered.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board:

- *Reiterate their finding of 2010 that the extent of alteration to the historic buildings -- including removal of the rear ell-wing on 1743, the roof of 1749, and interior demising walls -- is consistent with the purposes of the act and would not constitute demolition requiring review by the Mayor's Agent;*
- *Find the height, mass and footprint of the proposed rear addition to be sufficiently pulled away as to be respectful to the adjacent property to the east;*
- *Direct the applicants to continue studying the architectural character of the addition, with consideration given to materials, coloration, scale, and composition, in order to improve the compatibility of the addition with the subject properties and the Dupont Circle Historic District;*
- *Direct the applicants to continue working with staff to further develop the scope of exterior restoration, including recreation of the missing red tile roof on 1743 and, retention to the extent possible of significant interior finishes, such as fireplace mantles, wainscoting, and the distinctive Colonial Revival stair in 1745.*
- *Have the project return to the Board for further review when appropriate.*